THE NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • TUESDAY • JANUARY 4, 2022 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 20 • LATE CITY EDITION

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READY TO HOST SAARC SUMMIT, INDIA CAN JOIN VIRTUALLY: PAK

Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on Monday his country is ready to host the 19th SAARC summit

REGIONAL BLOC DYSFUNCTIONAL SINCE 2016

SAARC — a regional grouping comprising Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — has not been very active since 2016. "India has made this forum dysfunctional because of its stubbornness. They are not ready to come to Islamabad," Qureshi alleged, expressing hope that New Delhi will attend the next meet at least virtually

'HINDUTVA THINKING HURTS RELATIONS'

- The 2016 summit in Islamabad was called off after India and a few others pulled out following a terror attack on an Indian Army camp in Uri, Jammu & Kashmir
- Qureshi blamed India's 'Hindutva thinking' for sabotaging the prospects of good ties between the two countries

2014

THE LAST SAARC SUMMIT WAS HELD MORE THAN SEVEN YEARS AGO IN KATHMANDU

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China building a bridge to link Pangong banks

Aware of construction on the lake, says Army

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

AMID the continuing Sino-India stand-off at multiple points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in East Ladakh, it has now emerged that China is building a bridge to link the North and South banks of the Pangong Lake. Both sides disengaged from the lake in February last after being locked in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation for months.

"The construction of the bridge is going on for some time and we are well aware of it," a source confirmed. It is roughly 25 km ahead of the LAC on the Chinese side where the gap between the two banks of the lake is around 500 metres, the source added. The bridge will reduce the cross country distance by 150 km, which now is around 200 km, and slash by one-third the present travel time of 12 hours.

On the North bank, one end of the bridge is close to Khurnak Fort and the other end near the Moldo Garrison on the South bank. The Pangong Tso is a 135 km long high altitude (around 14,300 ft) lake with around 45 km on the Indian side of the LAC.

On August 29, 2020, the Army had offset the tactical balance in favour of India by occupying the Kailash Ranges, which brought the Moldo Garrison of the PLA under direct observation, making China uneasy.

This newspaper broke the story about the Chinese forces clashing with the Indian Army at Finger 4 in May 2020 and mobilising their forces in stand-off deployment at various points. The tensions between the two sides led to a deadly clash on June 15, 2020 in which both sides lost lives.

On February 11, 2021, the two sides reached an agreement and disengagement took place on both the banks of the Pangong Lake. The Indian claim line is at Finger 8 where the Chinese troops moved back after removing all the construction done during the stand-off period. Disengagement also took place at Galwan and Gogra.

The mountain spurs descending towards Pangong Lake are called Fingers and they are from 1 to 8.

Both sides continue to hold talks at the military and the diplomatic levels to resolve the stand-off and disengage.

Over 50,000 troops on either side

Despite 13 rounds of Corps Commander-level talks and disengagements at a few places, more than 50,000 troops are still stationed on each side along with artillery, tanks, missiles and heavy machinery

THE STORY IN NUMBERS

40,02,782 Adolescents administered Covaxin on Day One

6.46% Case positivity rate in Delhi, though only **4.65%** of Covid beds in hospitals are occupied

FIVE Poll-bound states asked by EC to step up Covid vaccination drive, deploy only double-jabbed on election duty

100+ Kolkata doctors in different hospitals tested positive for Covid in the last 24 hrs

50% Of Central govt staff below under secretary level allowed to work from home

81% Of latest samples that underwent genome sequencing in Delhi test positive for Omicron

66 Of 2,000 people on board Cordelia cruise ship at Goa port test Covid positive

Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai and his cabinet colleagues at the launch of the Covid-19 vaccination drive for teenagers, in Bengaluru on Monday

K'taka sees 10 more Omicron cases, tally at 76

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

KARNATAKA reported 10 more cases of Omicron, taking the tally of this highly-contagious Covid variant to 76 on Monday.

"Ten new cases of Omicron have been confirmed in Karnataka on January 2," tweeted Health and Medical Education Minister Dr K Sudhakar.

Of the new cases, eight, including five international travellers, were from Bengaluru and two from Dharwad. Two are non-vaccinated children, while the remaining are adults who are fully vaccinated. One is a 19-year-old male, who travelled from the US to Bengaluru and developed mild symptoms later and tested positive. He had three primary contacts who are all positive and five secondary contacts who are negative.

The country's first two Omicron cases were reported in Karnataka on December 2. P5

Cabinet meet today, tougher curbs likely

The Karnataka government is likely to restrict large gatherings, following the CM's meeting with an expert committee on Tuesday, followed by the cabinet meeting on Thursday. They will discuss the Covid situation and take appropriate decisions for long-term measures to tackle Covid-positive cases, especially the Omicron variant. Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said the experts have been asked to suggest appropriate control measures without affecting people's routine life. P4

Adolescent shots within shelf life: Govt

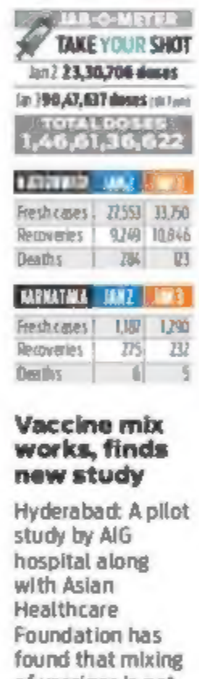
SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

A major controversy broke out on Monday on using vials of Covaxin whose labels said they were past their expiry date, when the vaccination window opened for the adolescents, forcing the Centre to issue a clarification.

Several people took to social media to allege that their children were being administered Covaxin from vials that showed they were past their expiry dates, but hospitals, in separate sheets, had assigned revised expiry dates and claimed they were within their shelf life. The Union health ministry rejected the allegations, calling them "false and misleading and based on incomplete information".

The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation had on October 25 last year, in response to an application by Bharat Biotech, approved the extension of shelf life of Covaxin from 9 months to 12 months. Likewise, the shelf life of Covishield was extended from 6 months to 9 months in February. "The shelf life of vaccines is extended by the national regulator based on comprehensive analysis and examination of stability study data," the statement read.

Officials added that Bharat Biotech could take back the Covaxin stocks from hospitals and release them after re-labelling to avoid confusion. Over 40 lakh adolescents took their shots on Day 1.



Vaccine mix works, finds new study

Hyderabad: A pilot study by AIG hospital along with Asian Healthcare Foundation has found that mixing of vaccines is not just safe but also effective. The study is in its preprint stage P7

Haveri tops, Bengaluru fares bad in vaxxing teens

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

BENGALURU Urban, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) area and 13 other districts fell below the state average of 65 per cent coverage on the first day of vaccination for 15-18 age segment for the first dose, launched by Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai at the BBMP Higher Primary and Pre-University College, Bairaveshwara Nagar, Moodalapalya, in Bengaluru on Monday.

Bengaluru Urban is the third lowest, while BBMP area is the 13th lowest in the 31 districts listed.

As per data compiled till 9.30 pm, Bengaluru Urban was only able to reach 34 per cent or 9,213 doses of its targeted 32,800, while BBMP area did a shade better with 57 per cent or 22,604 doses of its target of 40,000.

On the other hand, 10 districts did exceedingly well, crossing the 100 percent target. They were Haveri (the highest with 281 per cent), Belagavi (240 per cent), Dharwad (230 per cent), Kolar (210 per cent), Hassan (139 per cent), Chikkamagaluru (136 per cent), Kalaburagi (124 per cent), Uttara Kannada (110 per cent), Udupi (105 per cent) and Kodagu (103 per cent). P5

Pvt school makes jab must for board exam

St Mary's Girls High School in Bengaluru's Miller's Road has informed parents that students need to get vaccinated before the board exam. They said since it is compulsory, BBMP will organise a vax camp in the school itself. P2

RACE FOR IIMs

CAT results out, Karnataka man gets 99.99 pc

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

Nine candidates have scored 100 percentile in the Common Admission Test (CAT), whose results were announced on Monday. All of them are male, while seven are engineers. Nineteen candidates, including one from Karnataka, have secured 99.99 per cent.

The test was conducted on November 28 and 85 per cent, or 1.92 lakh, of the 2.3 lakh registered candidates appeared for one of the toughest entrance tests in the country. The results were announced by the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad, and are made available on the official website, iimcat.ac.in.

With this, Indian Institutes of Management and other business schools will announce the cutoffs for admissions soon.

Joblessness in states

Among states, Haryana witnessed the highest jobless rate in December at 34.1%, followed by Rajasthan (27.1%), Jharkhand (17.3%, Bihar (16%), J&K (15%), and Tripura (14.7%)

Unemployment rate spikes to 4-month high in Dec '21

SAMIKSHA GOEL @ New Delhi

INDIA's unemployment rate touched a four-month high of 7.91% in December 2021 against 7% in November and 7.75% in October, data released by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) on Monday showed.

Urban unemployment rate was 9.30% in December while it was 7.28% for rural areas. In November, the figures were 7% and 8.21%, respectively.

The last time the unemployment rate soared was in August 2021, at 8.3%. The latest spike seems to be linked to the Omicron-driven Covid surge, according to Yeshab Giri, chief commercial officer — staffing at HR consultancy firm Randstad India.

"Due to rising Omicron cases, many employees have reverse-migrated to their home towns. Restricted attendance in offices could be the cause of stalling in the hiring plans of many companies across sectors," said Giri, adding that the overall consumer sentiment has also fallen as people prefer to stay at home. Sounding optimistic, he said this is a temporary phase.

CONTINUED ON: P13

B'luru engineering student held in Bulli Bai case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mumbai, New Delhi

THE Mumbai police arrested a second-year civil engineering student, aged 21, from Bengaluru in connection with the Bulli Bai case. A case has been registered against unknown culprits under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code and Information Technology Act.

Maharashtra Minister of State for Home Satej Patil said the Mumbai Police have achieved a breakthrough in the case. "Though we cannot disclose the details at this moment, as it may hamper the ongoing investigation, I would like to assure all the victims that we are proactively chasing the culprits and they will face the law very soon," he added.

The police said the arrested person from Bengaluru was running one of the offending Twitter handles and uploading the content. The police sought information from Twitter and acted swiftly.

The offending app was morphing photographs of Muslim girls and women, and uploading them. The app, which has since been blocked by the hosting platform GitHub, appeared to be a clone of Sulli Deals, which triggered a similar row last year.

Politicians in Maharashtra had raised the issue and promised action against those targeting women from the particular community on social media.

In Delhi, the police sought details from GitHub about the developer of the 'Bulli Bai' app and asked Twitter to block and remove related "offensive contents" on its platform. The police have also sought from Twitter information about the account handler who first tweeted about the app.

This is the second time that the Mumbai police have acted swiftly. Earlier, they had arrested an engineer from Bengaluru for posting an offensive message about a cricketer's daughter.

EXPRESS READ

Daughter-in-law of ex-MLA held for IS links

Mangaluru: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday arrested Mariyam alias Deepati Marla, daughter-in-law of former MLA late B M Idinabba, from her residence in Mangaluru in connection with alleged links with terror outfit ISIS. | P6

Sameer Wankhede's tenure with NCB ends

Mumbai: The tenure of NCB Mumbai zonal director Sameer Wankhede with the agency has ended and his services have been put at the disposal of his parent organisation DRI. He was in the limelight following raids on a cruise in which Aryan Khan, son of actor Shah Rukh Khan, was held.

The all-India tiger assessment report is likely to be released on July 29, 2022

Tiger census from Jan 15 in state sans volunteers

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

THE eagerly-awaited tiger census, the line transect and sign survey, will kickstart in the state's tiger reserves from January 15. The exercise that was pending for the last three months will be completed by February-end and submitted to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change aims to release the all-India tiger assessment report on July 29, 2022, which is Tiger Day.

"As the field exercise was delayed, the stress was on the most-important aspect of the assessment, the camera-trap method. It started in October and most parts of the reserves and sanctuaries have been covered. Now, we will start the remaining part of the assessment — sign survey and transect-line assessment. We will start from January 15 and complete it by the month-end in tiger reserves and tiger-prevailing areas. In other forest patches, it will be completed by mid-February. No volunteers are being roped in this time," a senior forest department official told *The New Indian Express*. P7

KOHLI

MISSES OUT SECOND TEST, KL RAHUL STEPS IN

In a major setback for Team India, Virat Kohli was on Monday ruled out of the second Test against South Africa in Johannesburg just before the start of the game because of an upper back spasm, leaving KL Rahul to lead the side in the crucial match. In more disappointment, India were all out for 202 on Day 1 of the match | P15

NOT SO SWEET

In a pickle... less mangoes in market this year

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

HERE is disappointing news for lovers of the king of fruit, mango. This year, the yield will be less, which also means prices will be high. It is because of high moisture content in the soil after heavy, untimely rain last year which has led to vegetative growth and not floral growth in mango trees.

Karnataka is one of the top mango growers in the country, with 1.7 lakh hectares in 16 districts under cultivation, especially in Kolar, Chikkaballapur, Dharwad, and Ramanagar districts.

Every year, the production is around 10 lakh tonnes. But in 2020, it was 15 lakh tonnes, SV Hittalmani, former additional director of horticulture and senior horticulture scientist, told *The New Indian Express*. The production this year could be half of last year, around 8 lakh tonnes, as per initial estimates. "However, we will get the second estimation done after January 15, which will give us a clearer picture. But the yield will definitely be less than last year," he said.

Last year, the entire state, including mango-growing regions, experienced heavy rain in November which has led to high moisture content in the soil, he said. "Mango trees are giving out more leaves. In fact, the floral growth, instead of vegetative growth, should have been more around this season. With less or no flowers, the yield will naturally be low. We are expecting the mango season to start on time in March, but with a lesser number of fruits," he added.

Growers are also worried as flowers are setting late. P7